



City of Arlington – Water Utilities

Water Taste and Odor Frequently Asked Questions

What is making my water taste bad?

- A. A compound found in naturally occurring blue green algae has been identified as the cause for the taste and odor. These algae are present in surface water reservoirs in North Texas throughout the year. However, when water temperatures fall in the winter months, these algae can die off in great numbers and release the taste and odor compound. The compound is called Geosmin (pronounced gee oz min) and it can cause tastes and odors at very low levels.

Is this compound causing the taste and odor harmful?

- A. No. Geosmin is not harmful. However it is a very potent compound that can cause taste and odors at levels as low as 5 parts per trillion. That is the equivalent of a drop of water in four Olympic sized swimming pools.

Is my water safe to drink?

- A. Yes. All laboratory tests have shown the City's water meets all water quality guidelines for health standards. Although the water might have an off taste, it is safe to drink.

Is there anything I can do to make the water taste better?

- A. Yes. The water tastes better if it sits for some time and is chilled. Therefore, setting a pitcher in the refrigerator will help to some degree. Adding a slice of lemon to the water sometimes helps as well.

Why hasn't this happened before?

- A. It has. But the City of Arlington's water treatment plants have a very high tech treatment process called ozonation and biofiltration that has the capability to remove taste and odor causing compounds under most circumstances. Unfortunately, the levels of this compound are so high this year that they are a challenge even for Arlington's treatment process.

So what is different about this time?

- A. The high levels of the Geosmin in the water and the suddenness of the event. The Tarrant Regional Water District ("TRWD") experienced a break on a large diameter water transmission main that supplies the City of Arlington. As a result, TRWD began utilizing another segment of the pipeline and a different reservoir to supply the City. This other reservoir had high levels of Geosmin in it.

Why can't you just switch to another supply of water?

- A. The City purchases 100% of the water it uses to treat for its customers from TRWD. TRWD has a network of reservoirs but is limited in the capability of drawing from particular reservoirs if a transmission main is out of service, like it was with this occurrence. Therefore, the City of Arlington is limited to treating the water from whatever reservoir TRWD is supplying water from at the time.

When will the water taste better?

- A. TRWD has stated that the transmission line will be repaired and refilled this week. The City expects to return to the water supply from the Richland-Chambers reservoir towards the end of this week. With the water from Richland-Chambers, the amount of Geosmin in the water is historically much lower and the taste and odor will dissipate from the water in a few days. Ultimately, the taste and odor should be gone by January 19.

Why isn't this happening to other cities?

- A. It is. Any customer that receives water supplied by TRWD, like the City of Ft. Worth, City of Dalworthington Gardens and others are all dealing with water from the same source with the same taste and odor problems.